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MWSS renews call to hike Angat Dam allocation

By DANESSA RIVERA

The Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) is again seeking to increase its raw water allocation from Angat Dam to ensure continuous supply for Metro Manila consumers.

The agency asked the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) to increase its raw water allocation from the current 50 cubic meters per second to 52 cms to refill the La Mesa Dam, MWSS Field Operations Management Department manager Jose Alfredo Escoto Jr. said at a forum yesterday.

"We have the request for that since before the Holy Week," Escoto said.

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MWSS

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Starting this month, the water allocation was supposed to decrease to 48 CMS, but the NWRB decided to extend the 50 CMS for the MWSS until April 15.

Currently, the La Mesa Dam's level is at 76.87 meters, which is still above the critical level of 74.5 meters.

"It is important to maintain this level so that supply to Manila Water will not be affected. La Mesa is utilized as a buffer. And because water level is declining, our action is to have it refilled with supply from Angat," Escoto said in a mix of Filipino and English.

MWSS Site Operations Management Department officer-in-charge Delfin Sespene said the request would be presented at a meeting with NWRB officials today.

"There's a board meeting with the NWRB and we re-

quested to present our request during the meeting," Sespene said. "We are hopeful our request will be granted even for just a certain period to maintain the levels of Ipo and La Mesa dams."

In case the NWRB will not approve its request, the MWSS said it still has supply augmentation measures in place.

These measures include non-revenue water management of Maynilad Water Services Inc. to recover some losses.

The MWSS also enjoined Maynilad to operate its Cavite Portable Water Treatment Plant in Imus within the month, as well as its 10-MLD Parañaque New Water Treatment Plant.

It was also urged to recover backwash water system in La Mesa Water Treatment Plants 1 and 2 and activate its existing nine MLD deep wells.

"We will also fast-track the repair of aqueduct leaks in the raw water conveyance system," Sespene said.



FROM THE EXPERTS Water supply was the main topic discussed at the Pandesal forum on Tuesday, April 11, 2023. From left are MWSS managers Delfin Sespene and Jun Escoto, FutureWater Asia CEO Dondi Alikpala, Albay Second District Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente 'Joey' Salceda, and Pandesal Forum moderator Wilson Lee Flores. PHOTO BY BENEDICT ABAYGAR JR.

'Kaliwa dam key to stable water supply'

BY ARLIE O. CALALO

THE government must speed up the development of long-term water resources to spare Filipinos from another water crisis, an expert said Tuesday.

FutureWater Asia Chief Executive Officer Dondi Alikpala said that the China-backed New Centennial Water Source-Kaliwa Dam project is the only viable long-term solution to the perennial water problems in Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

Any further delay in the project's completion may adversely affect the stability of the already dwindling supply, especially in the National Capital Region, he said at the Pandesal Forum

held in the Kamuning Bakery in Quezon City.

"The threat of another water crisis is serious, and this should be immediately addressed so that Filipinos will not suffer. We cannot afford to face another water crisis. That's why we must accelerate the development of long-term water resources such as the Kaliwa Dam," Alikpala said.

He cited the need for a new operating dam since Angat Dam,

which is Metro Manila's main water source, can no longer keep up with the rising demand for water.

"There is also overpopulation and climate change that call for an immediate solution," Alikpala added.

Engineer Delfin Serene, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) Site Operations and Management Department manager, said that if it were not for some delays in the Kaliwa Dam project, "Metro Manila residents would have sufficient water supply today."

Alikpala, a former MWSS chairman, said that regulators must expedite the processes and clearances needed for the full construction of Kaliwa Dam which is 21 percent complete.

The contractor promised to

complete the project by 2026 and start commissioning the dam, which is expected to generate 600 million liters per day (MLD) while its water conveyance tunnel can further produce an estimated 2,400 MLD in early 2027, Alikpala said.

He said the government also has to address the leakages along the water line to La Mesa Dam, which MWSS Deputy Administrator Jose Dorado recently revealed.

Albay Second District Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente "Joey" Salceda, who chairs the ways and means committee of the House of Representatives, said that government regulators should release a transparent inventory of water sources to present the true picture of water supply and demand.

"Unless there is a transparent

review of the current supply-demand scenario given the economic implications of a water shortage, stakeholders will remain blind about the current state of our water industry," Salceda said.

Alikpala agreed that water concessionaires should be guided on how they can manage the supply available for their consumers and implement mitigating measures to prevent, as much as possible, any supply interruption.

"The government needs to revisit and reevaluate how water resources in Luzon are being allocated and distributed. Conducting an inventory of existing water sources and its corresponding MLD/mcm output may give a clearer picture of the collective capacity and whether this is enough to address the total demand for water whether for do-

mestic, industrial, or agricultural use," he said.

Jose Alfredo Escoto Jr., MWSS' field operation manager, said data can help the public understand the state of the water industry and help them to become efficient and conservative consumers.

"The truth is safe and secure water is barely within reach for many Filipinos, which is ironic because we are an archipelagic country and we are blessed with rich water resources," Escoto said.

"The issue of water is already too big, and everyone here needs to play their role. Clearly, it is imperative to galvanize all sectors of society — legislators, regulators, water concessionaires and consumers — to do their share in ensuring water security for everyone," he added.



Armed illegal miners thrive in Tampakan

Mines and Geosciences Bureau execs say illicit activities happening in unpopulated areas guarded by men carrying high-powered guns

By **Bong S. Sarmiento**
@InqNational

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—Illegal small-scale mining operations and loose firearms have proliferated within the controversial multibillion-peso Tampakan project site, Southeast Asia's largest undeveloped copper-gold minefield, officials said.

Efren Carido, director of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau in Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos), said Tuesday that authorities have uncovered illegal small-scale mining operations at the project site in Tampakan town in South Cotabato province.

The Tampakan mining project is being developed by Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI), a domestic corporation with direct foreign investments, for \$5.9 billion (roughly P323.9 billion) within a 23,000-hectare area estimated to have a deposit of about 15 million tons of copper and 17.6 million tons of gold.

"There is a resurgence of illegal small-scale mining operations in the tenement of SMI. These include sluice and tunnel mining for gold deposits," Carido told the Inquirer.

Some of the illegal mining sites in Sitio Acacia of Barangay Danlag and Sitio Aspak of Barangay Tablu in Tampakan yielded ball mill machines, an indication that these illegal miners intended to be in these sites for the long haul, Carido added.

He said that three raids conducted by a multipartite team last month led to the confiscation of equipment used in illegal mining operations, including flexible plastic pipe, collapsible hose, sledgehammer, shovel, plastic pail, cut nets and screens, among others.

About 3 ha of the mountain have been destroyed by sluice mining, also known as "banlas" mining, considered a highly destructive mining method because it involves pouring large amounts of water using high-pressure water jets on a mountain's surface to extract the rocks containing the gold ore, and then pan them with mercury.

Banlas operations were first uncovered in the gold-rush town of T'boli, South Cotabato, in the early 2000s.

Isolated areas

Carido said they already informed SMI about the resurgence of illegal mining in its tenement, where copper rather than gold made up the bulk of the deposits.

The mining firm is mainly responsible to protect its tenement from illegal mining activities, he added.

Ores containing copper were strewn all over the illegal mining sites, because the illegal miners were after the gold ores, Carido said.

He said that the sites where illegal mining thrived were far from populated communities. "Before we could even reach the

place, the illegal miners would know we are coming through their informants who alert them using text messages or calls," Carido said.

He said the small-scale illegal mining operations have gone beyond the Tampakan project tenement and have reached the town of Columbio, Sultan Kudarat.

Warning shots

Siegfred Flaviano, chief of the South Cotabato Provincial Environment Management Office, said he already reported the presence of armed men allegedly involved in illegal mining within the Tampakan project during a meeting of the Provincial Peace and Order Council last month.

"(We can hear) warning shots every time we conduct monitoring and surveillance in the area," he said in a statement.

At least two sources from communities within SMI's mining tenement separately confirmed the resurgence of illegal mining activities as well as the presence of loose high-powered firearms in the area.

Requesting anonymity for security reasons, they revealed the firearms were bought allegedly using money from the illegal small-scale mining operations or from the payment of the lands they leased to the mining company, which pays P160,000 per hectare for 25 years, or P6,400 annually.

Flaviano said they learned of the identity of the supposed

financier, whom he declined to name, from the suspect they arrested during one of the raids.

The Tampakan project has yet to start commercial operations since it was officially launched in the town on Jan. 17, 2003. The firm is reportedly eyeing to commence full swing operations in 2026.

It has been facing staunch opposition from the local Catholic church and allied organizations on concerns over the environment, food security, health and human rights.

In a study, SMI said that the Tampakan project could yield an average of 375,000 metric tons of copper and 360,000 ounces of gold per year in the expected 17-year life of the mine. The company eyed open-pit mining as the most viable method to extract the deposits of the large-scale mining project but South Cotabato had banned open-pit mining since 2010.

However, in a ruling known only last month, the Court of Appeals (CA) said that the provincial open-pit mining ban applied only to small-scale mining operations and did not cover large-scale mining operations, including the Tampakan project.

South Cotabato Gov. Reynaldo Tamayo, Jr., following a meeting with Diocese of Marbel Bishop Cerilo Casicas, had vowed to appeal the CA decision. The diocese has been spearheading the campaign to stop the open-pit mining project of SMI. INQ



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BOHOL GOV PROBES CUTTING OF CENTURY-OLD

ACACIA TREES IN CAPITAL CITY

By Leo Udtohan
@leoudtohanINQ

TAGBILARAN CITY—Top government officials in Bohol province have ordered thorough investigations into the cutting of acacia trees, which were over a hundred years old, to make way for a gasoline station in this provincial capital.

Gov. Aris Aumentado on Monday directed the Bohol En-

vironment Management Office (Bemo) and the Provincial Legal Office (PLO) headed by lawyer Handel Lagunay to immediately start the probe to find out who was responsible for the cutting of trees.

Vice Gov. Victor Balite, the presiding officer of the provincial board, also ordered an investigation on the matter in aid of legislation.

He said he would call to a

meeting the concerned persons and agencies, such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the owner of the establishment to be constructed, and those who chopped the trees.

The provincial officials were responding to a social media post of Bishop Alberto "Abet" Uy of the Diocese of Tagbilaran who exposed the cutting of century-old acacia trees in the city.

The prelate said at least four of these trees were cut down to pave way for a construction of a gasoline station along CPG North Avenue corner Zamora Street in Barangay Taloto, Tagbilaran City.

Residents living near the area believed the presence of numerous old acacia trees in their community have contributed to the cold weather in the place they called "Baguio

Drive," alluding to Baguio City, which is known as the "summer capital of the Philippines" owing to its cool climate.

Uy expressed dismay over the cutting of acacia trees which he said would affect the environment.

"We have more than enough gas stations in Bohol. More than enough. But, we are badly needing huge trees (like acacia trees) because of the damaging effects

of global warming and climate change. The cutting of four huge acacia trees is a big loss, not only for this generation, but for many generations to come," Uy said in a post on his Facebook account on April 2.

People in the community, including professionals and youth leaders, also took to social media their dismay over the cutting of the old acacia trees in Tagbilaran. INQ



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FLUSHING OUT OPERATION Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel, in this photo posted on April 11, use low-pressure pumps to flush out remaining oil sludge in mangrove areas in the coastal village of Tinogboc, Semirara Island in Caluya, Antique, one of the areas affected when tanker MT Princess Empress sank off Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28 while carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel. —PCG FACEBOOK PHOTO



REGIONS

Mindoro mangroves under oil slick threat

Oil sludge from the sunken tanker MT Princess Empress now poses a threat to the valued mangroves at a coastal village in Pola, Oriental Mindoro province. The contamination prompted a group of scientists and environmental advocates to sound the alarm, as they warned that the damage could go beyond the local fauna. Pola was one of the first towns to be affected by the Feb. 28 sinking. —STORY BY DELFIN T. MALLARI JR. **A8**

'GROWING ECOLOGICAL CATASTROPHE'

OIL SLUDGE TAINTS MANGROVES IN ORIENTAL MINDORO

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
@dtmallarijrINQ

Traces of oil sludge were found in some mangroves at a village in Pola town, Oriental Mindoro province, that is still reeling from the impact of the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress, an environmental study showed on Monday.

The contamination has forced a coalition of scientists and environmental advocates to sound the alarm as they warned that it could lead to death of the local mangrove ecosystem if the spread would not be prevented.

"The presence of oil in mangrove leaves could hinder primary production, especially on juvenile mangroves that only have few leaves, which could affect their survival," said the coalition composed of Brigada Kalikasan, Advocates for Science and Technology for the People, Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC) Philippines, Serve the People Corps-Southern Tagalog (STPC), and local organization Angat Kabataan Mindoreño.

Dead trees

The finding was based on a research done by the coalition on the effect of the oil spill in two coastal villages in Pola and four in Calapan City from April 1 to April 3.

Pola is one of the first towns to be directly hit by the oil spill caused by MT Princess Empress, which sank off Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28 while carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil.

It said oil found on the root structures of trees could also prevent mangroves from breathing.

While the extent of the oil spill on mangroves in Calapan City was "minimal," the group found several dead juvenile mangrove trees at Barangay Tagumpay in Pola, but noted that "the cause of mortality is not certain."

"Traces of oil were also observed around these mangroves. Oil traces have also been observed to seep into the sand," they said.

Mangrove forests, also known as the "rainforests of the sea," are an important part of the marine ecosystem, as the roots of the trees provide shelter for marine life while their fallen leaves become feed for fish and other marine animals.

Negative impact

According to the environmentalist group Greenpeace, the oil spill has already affected 5,185 hectares of corals, sea grass and mangroves in Oriental Mindoro, where 10 towns had been declared in a state of calamity due to the oil spill, and in Western Visayas, mainly on Caluya Islands in Antique province.

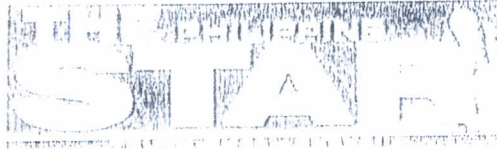
Greenpeace, in a post on its Facebook page on April 5, branded the oil spill as a "growing ecological catastrophe."

"It is impacting some of the country's most important and biodiverse marine protected areas and fisheries areas, including the Verde Island Passage (VIP)," the group said.

VIP is a body of water between Batangas and Mindoro Island where the world's most critical marine biodiversity center is found. The strait is some 100 kilometers from Pola town, where the tanker was last located after it sank on Feb. 28. INQ



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TD Amang to bring heavy rain over eastern Phl

By ROMINA CABRERA

Tropical Depression Amang, the first cyclone of the year, will bring heavy to intense rains over the eastern parts of Luzon and the Visayas, according to state weather forecasters.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysi-

cal and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said tropical cyclone wind signal no. 1 has been hoisted over parts of the country as Amang heads westward toward the coast of Catanduanes.

Amang was located 270 kilometers east of

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TD Amang From Page 1

Virac, Catanduanes in its 5 p.m. advisory.

It is expected to remain offshore over the waters east of Luzon until the end of the week. However, a landfall scenario over the Bicol Peninsula is not being ruled out.

Amang is forecast to remain a tropical depression and may possibly weaken into a low-pressure area by late tomorrow or early Friday.

Amang was moving westward at 30km/h and was carrying maximum sustained winds of 55 km/h near the center and gustiness of up to 70 km/h.

Signal No. 1 was raised over Catanduanes, Sorsogon, Albay, Camarines Sur, Camarines Norte, parts of Quezon, Marinduque, Masbate, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Samar and Biliran.

Strong winds may pose minimal to minor threat to life and property.

Signal no. 1 may be hoisted in other localities in Eastern Visayas and Bicol Region as Amang moves westward.

PAGASA said that intense rains, between 100-200mm of rainfall, are expected until Thursday in the Bicol Region, Northern Samar and the northern portions of

Samar and Eastern Samar.

Preparedness

The National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC) is now taking necessary preparedness measures in anticipation of the effects of Tropical Depression Amang.

Rescue and relief items are being readied in case there would be a need to send them to areas where help would be needed as the Luzon and Visayas provinces brace for the first typhoon of the year.

Office of Civil Defense (OCD) spokesman Assistant Secretary Raffy Alejandro said the NDRRMC and its regional counterparts have been placed on alert.

He said pre-disaster risk assessment that will determine the alert status and its corresponding preparedness measures of affected regions and provinces are being carried out.

Alejandro said the OCD-NDRRMC is also in close coordination with all concerned member-agencies to ensure the availability and pre-positioning of response assets and relief items for immediate deployment and distribution.